Reflektive

HR Guide to Designing an Engagement Program

Forward

Employee engagement is a major challenge for companies across the United States: 66% of US workers aren't engaged, and 51% of all US employees say they are actively looking for a new job or watching for openings, per Gallup. Low engagement impacts corporations in meaningful ways - business units with lackluster engagement are more likely to experience higher turnover, higher absenteeism, and lower productivity.

Gallup estimates the cost of disengaged employees for U.S. companies to be over $400 billion.

This guide for HR professionals explains the best ways to assess and improve employee engagement. Per Jack Welch, "It goes without saying that no company, small or large, can win over the long run without energized employees who believe in the mission and understand how to achieve it."

Table of Contents

1.0
Engagement is Broken

Companies continue to prioritize employee engagement, investing nearly $720 million annually on efforts to improve it. Despite these efforts, employee engagement is still an issue for many organizations. And one of the most common and costly engagement methods — employee surveys — hasn't delivered on its promise of leading to a more engaged workforce.

58% of companies are not taking meaningful action based on their survey data. Does this mean employee engagement surveys are obsolete? Definitely not, but it is time to address that they're broken and find out what we can do to fix them in order to increase engagement and employee sentiment.

With proper engagement surveys, HR leaders have a real opportunity to influence their employees' wellbeing as well as their company's bottom line.

2.0
Why Your Organization Needs Engagement Surveys

If you haven't conducted an employee survey before, getting started can be rife with questions: What questions should we include? How do we avoid bias and get the most out of a survey? Will people actually participate and share their experience? Should it be anonymous?

Perhaps the most pressing question of all: Why even do an employee survey? It's helpful to understand what an employee survey measures before diving into the why behind conducting it.

The main function of the employee survey is to assess:

The level of employee engagement and what may drive it

How satisfied employees are with their compensation, benefits, and work environment

The effectiveness of management and leadership

1. Engagement is tied to productivity

Companies in the US realize over 85 percent of their value from the contributions of people, so optimizing employee engagement and performance is essential to business success.

Engaged employees are more satisfied and invested in the success of their organization, and they typically go on to become top performers. Why? Well, engagement implies an emotional commitment on the employee's behalf, which means they use their extra energy and attention at work rather than just "doing their job" and clocking out at the end of the day. Research from Harvard Business Review also shows that engagement leads to greater innovation, lower turnover, and more productive people.

Over 85% of a company's value comes from the contributions of people.

All this to say, engagement is a crucial leading indicator for company success, but organizations need the right engagement surveys and strategy in place.

2. Increase Communication

The feedback from an employee survey can be a catalyst for authentic dialogue and impactful change. Most people will feel more comfortable being honest in a confidential forum as opposed to a more formal venue, such as an interview or face-to-face conversation. Surveys should also be designed to minimize bias to ensure that the data gleaned from them is more open and candid.

At the outset, having an option to provide honest feedback will help employees feel more heard and valued. From there, leaders can build on the results of the survey to keep communication flowing and demonstrate that they are reacting to employees' needs.

3. Improve Retention

High turnover can be detrimental to a company's success. Because replacing employees is so expensive, maintaining a high retention rate of skilled, engaged people can be life or death in some industries. As it turns out, employees with low engagement are four times more likely to quit than their high-scoring counterparts. And it's not just low-performers that produce low engagement scores. High-performers can also be disengaged and present significant flight risks to your organization.

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This paints a grim picture, but insights from employee surveys can be used to create an action plan for your company to avoid high turnover, especially for your most productive workers.

4. Identify Areas Where Things are Working

On the other side, surveys can also be used to find and share institutional best practices. There may be hidden pockets of high engagement or positive experience that other parts of the organization can learn from. By rewarding and elevating good practices, leaders can ensure they take root across the business. This is a great opportunity to utilize your company's recognition wall and increase morale.

As an HR leader, you should also be empowering managers and leaders in high-scoring parts of the organization to teach their peers. The sharing of best practices leads to many positive effects with low additional costs.

5. Create Baselines to Stay Accountable

Tracking is essential to any change or improvement effort within an organization. If you don't know where you're starting from, how can you know down the road that your time and energy yielded any results? Employee surveys create a baseline of engagement, satisfaction, and effectiveness metrics to measure against and track over time. The initial picture may or may not be pretty, but either way, having a baseline is important to work from.

As you delve into exploring the employee experience, keep in mind that surveys are not an opportunity to punish respondents and should never be used for retribution. Uncovering issues during your investigation doesn't mean it's time to start finger-pointing. Playing the blame game using survey results undermines trust among all levels of an organization and will impact your ability to get honest, actionable feedback moving forward.

Employee surveys create a baseline of engagement, satisfaction, and effectiveness metrics to measure against and track over time.

On the contrary, surveys are a great business tool for learning and growth when leaders use them in a positive manner. Engagement surveys should move the company toward delivering a positive work experience for everyone.

Employers have more control over this than they realize and stand to reap the benefits when people are passionate and excited about their work.

3.0
The Ideal Engagement Program

It's clear that an engagement program is crucial to keep employees happy and engaged. However, many customers ask us: what should be included in my engagement program? The answer is: there is no perfect program for every company! Global enterprise companies may have entire teams devoted to employee engagement, while newer businesses may have one HR leader who drives all people programs.

As a minimum we believe that all companies should **launch the following engagement surveys every year** to assess and improve employee sentiment:

One annual engagement survey to assess overall employee sentiment and how it has changed over time

Two follow-up pulse surveys on issues that are important to your employee population, such as benefits, communication, etc

One diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) survey for a deeper understanding of employee sentiment on inclusivity, equity, and belonging

Onboarding survey to drive continuous improvements to the onboarding experience

Exit survey to better understand key attrition drivers

Annual Engagement Survey

This survey provides a comprehensive view of employee sentiment across several engagement domains. The overall engagement score is an indicator of employees' discretionary effort, and their commitment to their company.

Number of Questions
While many companies send out 60-question surveys, we recommended a shorter survey (30-35 questions). A survey of this length still covers the most important engagement-related questions, but drives higher completion rates from workers.

Engagement Domains
We recommend including the following engagement-related themes in your survey. Each question will be associated with a theme, and contribute to the domain score.

- Engagement Measure
- Performance Drive*
- Career Growth
- Culture of Feedback*

- Work Environment/Culture Health*
- Performance Management*
- Leadership
- My Manager

Unique to Reflektive!

DOMAIN	SAMPLE QUESTION
Engagement Measure Assesses how well your company helps employees reach their highest productivity	*"You'll probably see me working at my company two years from now."*
Performance Drive Measures how motivated your employees are to work harder than they have in the past	*"I am developing important skills through the work I do every day."*
Career Growth Measures employees' awareness and interest in career progression at your company	*"I understand how to grow my career at my company."*
Culture of Feedback Assesses your recognition culture and if it provides value to employees	*"The feedback I receive helps me improve."*
Work Environment/Culture Health Measures your company's consistency with its company values	*"Our leadership team acts in alignment with our stated company values."*
Performance Management Assesses employee satisfaction with your current performance programs	*"I like our processes for reviews, feedback, and goal-setting."*
Leadership Measures employee sentiment on your current leadership team and their ability to drive future success	*"I believe in my company's plan for future growth."*
My Manager Measures managers' abilities to drive high-performing teams	*"My manager sets a high standard of excellence for the team."*

Follow-Up Pulse Surveys

Pulse surveys provide a deeper dive into the engagement domains that are most important to your workforce. We recommend that they're sent several months after the annual engagement survey, to follow-up on high-priority engagement-related items.

Number of Questions

Pulse surveys should have 3-5 questions that are related to a particular theme (e.g., career growth, benefits). This shorter survey length will drive higher completion rates among employees.

Sample Questions

Based on the selected theme, we recommend questions that address key employee concerns or areas of low engagement. For instance, if an HR leader identifies that employees are unhappy with commuter benefits and launches a new partnership to improve commuter benefits, he could ask the following questions in a pulse survey:

- *"Since we launched our partnership with ABC Commuter Company, is it easier or harder to commute from your home to the office?"*

- *"Since we launched our partnership with ABC Commuter Company, have you spent more or less money commuting from your home to the office?"*

- *"Overall, are you more or less satisfied with our new partnership with ABC Commuter Company? Feel free to write a response in the box below too."*

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Survey

DEI surveys equip companies with insights on the current inclusivity of their workplace. Per McKinsey, an inclusive workplace environment not only creates a better experience for employees, but it can help companies outperform by 15% - 35%.

Number of Questions

We recommend companies include ~20 questions in their DEI survey. A survey of this length should only take 7 minutes to complete. This format enables companies to cover key DEI domains (see below), but drive high completion rates.

Engagement Domains

We recommend the following themes, as they are the key influencers of inclusivity in the workplace:

DOMAIN	SAMPLE QUESTION
Work Environment	*"I can achieve work/life balance at my company."*
Belonging	*"I feel respected at my company."*
Feeling Valued	*"My coworkers are open and receptive to my feedback."*
Fairness	*"My job performance is evaluated fairly."*
Opportunities	*"I have an opportunity to become a leader at this company."*

Onboarding Survey

Onboarding surveys help companies assess the employee experience for new hires. Ideally, they provide actionable insights so HR teams know which onboarding components to improve (e.g., ensuring up-to-date company information is shared with all new hires).

Number of Questions

We recommend companies include 10-15 questions in their onboarding survey. This helps ensure that they cover the entire onboarding experience, from the employee's first interview to their first major project.

Engagement Domains

The following onboarding-related themes cover the end-to-end new hire experience:

DOMAIN	SAMPLE QUESTION
Recruiting	"I was provided accurate information about my company during the recruitment process."
Orientation	"I had a positive onboarding experience at my company."
Communication	"I have a clear understanding of my responsibilities and what I am expected to accomplish."
Engagement	"I feel welcome and part of the team."

Exit Survey

Exit surveys supplement exit interviews to provide companies with insights into employee departures. By identifying common themes among exit surveys, organizations can identify key areas to improve and reduce turnover.

Number of Questions

We recommend companies include 7-10 questions in their exit survey. This enables companies to get more insight into why the employee is leaving, and what can be done in the future to retain high performers.

Sample Questions

- *"During my time here, I was comfortable sharing feedback with my manager about the things that ultimately led me to leave."*

- *"I would be interested in working at this company again in the future."*

- *"I would recommend this company as a great place to work."*

Anonymity

We recommend that all surveys - engagement, pulse, DEI, onboarding, and exit - are anonymous. This helps drive employee trust, resulting in higher survey completion rates and more honest survey responses.

4.0

How to Launch an Engagement Program

Phase 1: Planning and Analysis

Align with Leadership

Before developing your engagement strategy, meet with your company's leadership to better align on their priorities. We recommend addressing the following with the executive team:

- How important is employee engagement vs. other corporate priorities?

- How much resources and budget are they willing to devote to employee engagement?

- What kinds of engagement-related initiatives are they willing to support?

Craft your Engagement Strategy

With insights from the executive team, you're better able to map out your engagement plan for the year. This plan should consist of:

- The objective of your engagement program

- How many surveys, and what types of surveys, you'd like to run

- The audience for your surveys

- Possible engagement-related initiatives you'd like to develop, e.g. company-wide communication plan, manager training, etc.

- Budget and resources available for engagement-related efforts

Share your engagement strategy with leadership to get their buy-in prior to launching surveys.

Build Employee Excitement

Prior to launching your first survey, let employees know what's coming, and why you're running this survey. Giving people more context - and the possible positive outcomes that can come from an engagement survey - can help boost the survey participation rate. You can even add some competition to make it fun, such as the first team or office to complete their surveys receives a free catered breakfast!

Finalize your Survey Questions

This step should be pretty straightforward! Reflektive has templates for all of the aforementioned surveys (engagement, onboarding, exit, DEI)... and you can customize them as you wish. We also have room for comments at the end of each question, to gather more details on the particular engagement theme. Reflektive has Natural Language Processing to quickly and easily analyze comment theme and sentiment.

Launch your Survey!

We recommend running your survey for **two weeks**, or until you reach an **80%** company-wide completion rate.

Analyze your Data

Identify where your company excels, and where there are opportunities to improve employee engagement.

Identify 2-3 Focus Areas

Based on your analysis, choose a couple of focus areas that are most meaningful and aligned with your company's priorities. These could be around a particular theme (e.g., benefits, inclusion) or related to a particular demographic (e.g., perhaps women, engineers, or employees in the Boston office have low engagement). Develop goals to address this gap.

ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICE

We recommend that all companies start by analyzing a few crucial engagement metrics. Our Guide to Interpreting Engagement Survey Results provides definitions, why the metrics matter, and target results for each metric.

View the guide →

Phase 2: Partner with Department Heads

Share your Analysis with Each Department Head

Schedule time to share departmental engagement results with company leaders. Start with three strengths, and three areas of opportunity.

Identify 1 or 2 Departmental Focus Areas

As a follow-up to your meeting, ensure that the department leader identifies one or two key areas to improve. Perhaps her reports would benefit from more career pathing, or a more flexible work from home policy. With these departmental focus areas confirmed, begin phase 3 (this phase will be driven by the department head).

Phase 3: Department Heads to Develop Action Plans

Unlike the first two phases, all of the steps listed below should be completed by the department head to drive change effectively.

Share Results in Team Meetings

We recommend that the department head discusses engagement results in the weekly team meeting(s). They can use this time to receive additional feedback, and gather more ideas on the best ways to address areas of opportunity.

Craft a Vision Statement

Based on their conversations and insights from employees, department heads should craft a vision statement to address their areas of opportunity. A sample vision statement could be:

"In one year, everyone on the Sales team knows how to grow their career and feels that there is diverse representation among Sales leadership."

Create an Action Plan

Based on the vision statement, the department head should create an action plan. This is very easy in Reflektive! Department heads can open their Engagement dashboard, click "Create Action Plan" on their report, and enter their high-level objective. They can assign key results to themselves or to others to follow-up on specific action items.

5.0
Engagement Resources

The below Reflektive assets include best practices and tips for getting the most out of your engagement surveys.

- Webpage on Reflektive's Engagement solution

- Landing page with Engagement eBook, worksheet, and case study

- Webinar on Reflektive's employee engagement solution and best practices for engagement implementation

- Reflektive blog posts on employee engagement

- Webinar on driving employee engagement with corporate social responsibility

6.0
Conclusion

As companies seek to retain top talent, it's crucial to continuously measure and improve employee engagement. By crafting an engagement plan and socializing it with leadership, HR teams are best equipped to bring their programs to life.

Snag, the largest and fastest-growing platform for hourly work, partnered with Reflektive to uncover issues in employee sentiment. They used the Reflektive platform to run their engagement survey and analyze results, and they also incorporated best practices for driving improvements across their organization:

- Analyzing engagement by team and department, and sharing with leaders and managers

- Encouraging engagement share-outs across teams for increased transparency and additional input from employees

- Developing an engagement-related goal for the entire company

After launching these efforts, Snag managers are receiving praise from their direct reports, and fewer employees are interviewing with other employers. "That's less people we have to recruit for," said Katie Webber, Senior HR Manager. "By being vulnerable and not dancing around things, we were able to show our commitment to positive, long-term partnerships with our employees."

With the right technology and the right initiatives in place, HR teams can drive positive change and boost engagement, productivity, and retention across their company.